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SUBJECT: SE GRATION'S VISIT TO ABYEI: INSECURITY, BUDGET, AND
EXPelled NGOS

REF: KHARTOUM 439

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In Abyei and Agok on April 7, SE Gration heard a consistent message from residents and officials, who said that the failure to fully implement the CPA and the Abyei Roadmap left the IDPs in Agok fearful of returning home and dependent on international NGOs for all basic services. They appealed to the U.S. and the international community for support. The only dissenting voices were two hardline NCP members of the Abyei Administration, who toed their party's line, one of them calling the expelled NGOs "spies." END SUMMARY.

IDPs in Agok Afraid to Go Home, Depend on INGOs

¶2. (SBU) On April 7, Presidential Special Envoy Scott Gration met with IDPs in Agok and visited the town of Abyei, where he met with the Abyei Interim Administration (AIA) and UNMIS. His party, which included CDA Fernandez, USAID Director Hammink, and Deputy Special Envoy Shortley, was accompanied by Government of South Sudan Presidential Affairs Minister Luka Biong Deng and head of the Government of National Unity's (GNU) Unity Fund Yehia Babiker Hussein. Landing first in Agok, where 70 percent of Abyei's residents continue to reside 11 months after they fled their homes during the May 2008 fighting, Gration was welcomed by Abyei Interim Administrator Arop Mayok, Dinka tribal and IDP leaders, and several hundred IDPs. In a traditional Dinka ceremony, a white cow was slaughtered in his honor at the gate leading to the meeting hall.

¶3. (SBU) SE Gration heard from Ngoc Dinka Paramount Chief Kuol Deng Kuol and various leaders of the IDP community. Speakers delivered a consistent message about IDP concerns; including lack of security, the inability of the AIA to provide basic services because of the lack of revenues, and the IDPs' resulting total dependence on international humanitarian NGOs that now have been ordered expelled by the GNU in Khartoum.

¶4. (SBU) Speakers all stated that IDPs are unable to return home to Abyei and rebuild because they fear a resumption of the kind of violence that caused them to flee last May. Paramount Chief Deng complained that the Joint Integrated Police Unit (JIPU) established to provide security in Abyei is insufficient in number to do the job, and also is short of equipment. (Note: Separately, UNMIS-Abyei Protection Officer told econoff that the JIPU now numbers about 330 and is up to four vehicles from one. However, due to lack of money for fuel, the JIPU is unable use the few vehicles it has for patrolling. End note.) Deng added that he feared that SE Gration's stop in Agok, before Abyei, would be cited as proof by some that the Ngoc Dinka homeland lies south of the River Kiir and not in the town of Abyei and north of the river.

¶5. (SBU) Speakers also complained that the GNU is not implementing either the CPA's 2004 Abyei Protocol or the Abyei Roadmap agreement

of last June, specifically by failing to fund the budget of the AIA, leaving it incapable of delivering basic services. One speaker asserted that money that should go to the AIA is being used to arm the Ngoc Dinka's "enemies" instead. As a result, they said, the IDPs depend totally on the efforts of the international humanitarian NGO's, 13 of which have now been ordered to leave Sudan by the GNU. One IDP leader noted that it had been the NGO's that had been on hand when the IDPs had fled to Agok in May, and had remained there ever since. By contrast, President Bashir had not visited Abyei or Agok even once since then to access the situation. Abyei needs more NGOs to provide basic services, not fewer, another added.

¶6. (SBU) SE Gration told the group that he had come to Sudan to "learn and listen." He said he had been touched by the number and enthusiasm of the people who came to greet him and honored by the sacrifice of the white cow. He praised the people of Abyei's sacrifice and commitment to peace and promised that the United States will do its best to ensure continued humanitarian assistance and implementation of the CPA.

Lunch With UNMIS: "Abyei is Not an Island"

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¶7. (SBU) In Abyei, UNMIS Head of Office Chris Johnson briefed SE Gration at a working lunch, reviewing for him events from the signing of the CPA leading up to last May's fighting. She noted that the provisions of the CPA's Abyei Protocol were never implemented, Abyei had no government (until late 2008) or post-conflict development, and UNMIS was severely restricted in its ability to patrol and to mitigate potential conflicts. Although violence had been averted on several previous occasions, in May a minor incident had escalated into a full scale SAF-SPLA battle, employing heavy weapons. Most of Abyei's population fled on the

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first day, had lost their homes and most of their belongings, and now are afraid to return.

¶8. (SBU) Now, she continued, the people are angry with the SPLA and UNMIS for not having protected them during the conflict. Johnson noted that the IDPs had been extremely articulate when they met with the joint UN-GNU humanitarian assessment looking into the NGO expulsions. They complained that they never had received anything from their own government; only the NGOs had helped them. She emphasized that the NGOs remain absolutely vital to the delivery of needed services. Access to water is especially critical. Dinka-Misseriya competition for water is a major source of conflict during the migration season. She also noted that UNMIS still is prevented from patrolling all of Sector VI, especially to the north, where trouble is most likely to start and in neighboring Southern Kordofan. "Abyei is not an island," she concluded, it is directly and immediately affected by events in adjoining areas.

Abyei Administration and Security Committee

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¶9. (SBU) Following a driving tour of forlorn Abyei town center to access the unrepaired destruction from last May's fighting and looting, SE Gration continued to a joint meeting of the AIA and the Abyei Security Committee, where he was greeted with the sacrifice of another white cow. Administrator Mayok (SPLM) and his Deputy Rahama al Nour (NCP) both welcomed Gration and thanked him for coming. Joint Integrated Unit (JIU) Commander Valentino reported that 90 percent of the security deployment under the Roadmap has been completed, but that his battalion is hampered because its locations were determined by geography, rather than any military doctrine. He added that, while for now security is "normal," there are still threats stemming from the presence of the Oil Police in Difra, and because the SAF and SPLA remain only a few kilometers north and south of Abyei, respectively, hampering the JIU's freedom of movement.

¶10. (SBU) AIA members praised the Gration visit and most repeated the concerns expressed by the IDPs earlier in the day. Agriculture Secretary Lual Deng listed the AIA's concerns as security, lack of budget revenues required to fund basic services, and the departure of the expelled NGOs. They agreed that Abyei remains depopulated because people lack confidence in the security situation. One

described the area as awash in weapons and stated that the JIPU is unequipped to handle the threat. Luai Deng stated that there can be no farming without security in the countryside. He also noted that without a budget, the AIA cannot carry out basic government functions and, therefore, the NGOs have had to provide the services instead.

NCP Members Break With Consensus

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¶11. (SBU) Two NCP members of the Administration dissented from the general consensus. Deputy Assembly Speaker Zakaria Atem stated that the Ngoc Dinka and the Misseriya peoples have for long coexisted peacefully, adding "we make problems here and send them to Khartoum," rather than vice versa. He contended that it was inappropriate for the SE to have visited Agok before Abyei, since Abyei is the headquarters. He asserted that the expelled NGOs had been circulating false information about the situation in Abyei. He further contended that only three of the 13 expelled NGOs were operating in Abyei, and that Khartoum will replace them soon with domestic ones.

¶12. (SBU) A strident Secretary of Social Affairs Ayom said that Abyei's problems were being exaggerated. He said that the GNU soon will be delivering the needed budget revenues, according to newspaper reports. (Note: Separately, Administrator Arop said that these reports are fabricated and that he only had been able to obtain about US\$1.5 million from the GNU on his most recent visit to Khartoum (reftel). End note.) Ayom declared his fervent support for President Bashir's decision to expel the NGOs, who he called "spies," and said that Sudan is within its rights to do so as a sovereign country. He further charged that it was the NGOs that had persuaded the IDPs to remain in Agok, when they have already returned to Abyei, refusing his demand that the NGOs stop helping in Agok. (Note: After the meeting one UNMIS official told emboffs that in the past Ayom has demanded that UNMIS force the IDPs to return to Abyei, even against their will. End note.)

¶13. (SBU) Administrator Mayok summed up, saying that everything SE Gration had heard reflects the reality of the situation. The problem is how to deliver security and basic services to the people. Without these, there is no government. Now, the Abyei region remains insecure and the AIA lacks money to provide the services.

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Without these, it will be very difficult to persuade the IDPs to return, and he will not force them. "Voluntary return" means voluntary, he said.

¶14. (SBU) SE Gration expressed first his gratitude for the ceremony and for the opportunity to listen to the views of the people of Abyei. He promised to take with him the concerns of all who he had heard. Second, he expressed disappointment at hearing the NGOs characterized as "spies," after the work and sacrifices they had made to deliver assistance to the people of Sudan. He warned that the problems of Abyei and Sudan will only be solved by working together, not by politicizing them.

COMMENT

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¶15. (SBU) SE Gration's visit to Abyei provided an opportunity to hear first-hand the concerns of the population, which center on security and basic services such as access to water, health services, and education. Despite the comments of the AIA's NCP members, there was a clear consensus that Khartoum has, and continues to, fail the people of the region, which remains ripe for renewed conflict. The dangerous reality is that much of the North-South border, including Abyei, is heavily armed and primed for renewed conflict based on tribal tensions, historic grievances, and competition for resources. It is a more dangerous reality in the long-term than Darfur, and will require constant attention and mediation to prevent an escalation into a larger conflict that could pull in regular armies from both sides. END COMMENT.

¶15. (U) SE Gration reviewed this message before transmission.

FERNANDEZ